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Editorial

The so-called modern, enlightened class who rejects religion is a victim of a colossal misunderstanding. It rates religion as being little better than a set of superstitions while regarding science as the purveyor of fundamental truths. This group apparently thinks that by rejecting what it thinks is superstition, it has automatically come to grips with realism. But this is only a kind of mental contorsion and is totally lacking in perception.

Where the modern educated class really goes wrong is in regarding the contemporary forms of different religions as the true religion, whether or not they have suffered enforced alterations or adaptations of a political, ethnic or social nature, and whether or not they are presented in forms which clearly demonstrate their original truths. They then compare these in the guise they have assumed in modern times with science. Such forms of 'religion' clearly comes out of such a comparison as something with no basis in reality, while science emerges as something with perceptibly solid foundations. Those who make this superficial comparison feel justified in their rejection of these religious forms as just so many outdated beliefs, but the truth is that, just as we now cannot accept ancient astrology, or alchemy, as being scientific in the modern sense, so is it equally wrong to take the prevalent *forms* of different religions as being necessarily representative of true religion.

Religion is the eternal law of God for man, and this remains enshrined in the verses of the Quran right up to the present day. It is a matter of historical fact that the present Quran is that very same Quran which the Prophet Muhammad presented to his people as being the word of God. Academic and historical research shows that no part of it has been removed, altered or deleted, nor have there been any later additions or interpolations. Now those who are serious in making comparisons between science and religion must do so by placing the findings of science side by side with the tenets of the Quran and only then, after mature deliberation, should they make their judgments.

Just as science cannot now be accepted in the forms which it took in its infancy many centuries ago, so it is equally wrong to believe that religion can be properly represented by distorted versions of divine scriptures. Only that can be termed true religion which is based directly on the word of God as it is enshrined in pristine form in the holy Quran.

3 July 1987

Patience, Perseverance and Compassion

“Success is a matter of cool decisions, without constant wavering and changing of the mind, acute observation, initiative, and unremitting attention to a vast number of petty details.”

The above statement would appear to be a sure-fire recipe for material success in a very large number of situations. As it happens, it is a formula evolved from the experience of Campbell Rogers, an expert in poultry keeping of international repute. But this unswerving devotion to taxing minutiae is not all that he advocates. He begins his now famous book, *Profitable Poultry-Keeping in India and the East* (D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay 1959) with the notion that success in large-scale poultry-farming is largely dependent upon one's temperament. He feels that one who does not love birds and animals can never build himself up in this profession. So that quite apart from patience, diligence, the ability to do without holidays and a keen eye for profit, one must also remain, kind, humane, and filled with compassion for living creatures.

With this dimension added to the overall picture, it would be reasonable to say that he gives us a valuable formula, not only for material success, but for useful, harmonious social living. Just as the successful poultry-man must give his attention to the habits and requirements of his birds, so also must the social being take into account the inclinations and compulsions of other and show his willingness to make concessions to them in the interests of maintaining the happiness and tranquility of society. Success in life is not just a matter of keeping one's nose to the grindstone and taking correct decisions about financial matters, but of understanding one's fellow-men and according them the kindness and respect which one would wish to have oneself.

3 July 1987

Piety is to get by, avoiding evil

Abu Hurayra was asked what piety was. "Have you ever treaded on a thorny path," he said in reply. "Why, yes," the man answered. "What did you do?" Abu Hurayra asked him. "When I saw a thorn, I kept to one side. I got by, avoiding thorns." "That is what piety is," Abu Hurayra said.

The Hereafter

Those huge masses of ice, which we know as icebergs, found floating in the seas of the North and South poles, number amongst the most deceptive and, therefore, most dangerous phenomena to be found in nature. Their deceptiveness lies in the fact that no matter how huge, or wonderful in configuration, what we see of them amounts to only one tenth of their enormous bulk. What lies below the surface of the ocean, spreading far and beyond the visible perimeter, poses tremendous hazards to the unwary. In some ways, our lives are like those floating mountains of ice. The part we spend in this world – about a hundred years, or less – is like the part of the iceberg which is visible above the surface. We can see it, touch it, feel it. We can take its measure and deal with it effectively. But the part which comes after death is like the submerged part – vast, unfathomable and fraught with peril. It is something which defies the imagination, but which we must nevertheless try to comprehend, for that is the part of human life which God has decreed should be eternal and, as such, ineluctable.

We are all familiar with the facts of our origin and the course which life takes from the womb until death. But at the end of our lifespan, whether it terminates in youth or in old age, our familiarity with the nature of things comes to an end. It has been surmised that death means total and final annihilation. But this is not so. Death is simply a means of consigning us to a new womb, to the womb of the universe itself. From that point, we are ushered into another world: the Hereafter. While the present, physical world as we know it has a finite time-frame, the Hereafter stretches away from us into infinity. We fondly imagine that there is some parallel between the pleasures and pains of this world and those of the next, but, in truth, nothing that we can experience in this world will ever match the extremes of agony and bliss of life after death. Those who merit punishment in the Hereafter will be condemned to suffer the most horrific pain for all time to come. But those who merit God's blessings in the Hereafter shall know the most wonderful joy and contentment.

It is because life in this world is intended to be a testing-ground that the world of the Hereafter remains beyond our reach. But all around us, we have innumerable signs which can help us, by analogy, to understand and appreciate the nature of the world to come. Imagine a room which ostensibly consists of four walls, furniture, a few material objects and some human occupants. To all outward appearances, that is what the room adds up to. But the moment we switch on the TV set, we are introduced to a hitherto unsuspected world of colour, movement, and highly vocal human activity. This world, with its scenery and very alive human beings had existed all along. It had only needed the flip of a switch to make us aware of it. Similarly, our terrestrial existence is made up of a world within a world. The world we know is concrete, visible, audible, tangible. The 'other' world the world within it, or rather, beyond it, is not however, one which can be apprehended through any of the normal human senses; no switch can be turned on to make us understand what it is really like. Only death can do this for us. And when we

reopen our eyes after death we find that what had formerly been impalpable, and quite beyond human comprehension is now a stark, overwhelming reality. It is then that we grasp what had hitherto existed, but remained invisible.

Once we have become clear in our minds that the after-life truly exists, we realize that the sole aim of our earthly existence should be to strive for success in the life to come, for, unlike the present ephemeral world, the Hereafter is eternal and real. What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

Many individuals lead immoral, even criminal existences because they feel that we are free to do as we please in this world. Freedom we do have, but it exists only so that God may distinguish between the good and the evil, and determine who deserves a place of honour and dignity in the Hereafter and who should be condemned to eternal disgrace. While there is nothing to prevent the good and the evil from living cheek by jowl in this world, they will be separated in the Hereafter like the wheat from the chaff and will be judged according to their record in this life. Some will be condemned to an eternal Hell of pain and distress, while others will be blessed with eternal bliss and pleasure. Each will get his deserts.

Now let us look at the Hereafter from another point of view. I once had occasion to visit a senior official, and as we sat on the lawns of his palatial bungalow / he suddenly exclaimed, "Maulana Sahib / you don't know how bad our life is! Tomorrow I have to be at the airport before sunrise to welcome a foreign dignitary, and not only shall I have to deprive myself of sleep, but I shall have to welcome him with smiles – and that in spite of the fact that he is somebody I despise!" This simple anecdote shows there are two sides to the lives of those in high office. On the one hand, they enjoy power and prestige and the many perquisites that go with them, while, on the other hand, there is a side to their lives which is far from being enviable. If you look deep into some of these 'great' men, you will discover that they achieve their high positions because they persuade themselves to be content with triviality. If, outwardly, they lead glamorous existences, it is because, privately, they stoop to hypocrisy, sycophancy, opportunism and unscrupulousness. This double life is the price they pay to bolster their own self-interest. In this respect, many are simply following the trends of the time. Every 'great' man has two sides to his life – one all brilliance and glitter, the other all dark and soulless. The power and glamour which he achieves in his life has something animal-like about it when he agrees to kill what is human in himself.

Just as there are two sides to every life in this world, there are two aspects of every act in relation to this world and the Hereafter. One aspect of each act is our acceptance of it as what it is seen to be in this world. The other aspect is what results from this act in terms of the Hereafter. Imam Ahmad narrates that the Caliph Umar once said:

"No drink of milk or honey is better than swallowing one's anger." In actuality, to swallow, or overcome one's anger is an extremely bitter experience, but in the Hereafter the result of doing so is sweeter by far than milk and honey. Today we reap the worldly fruits of our actions! tomorrow, in the Hereafter, we shall have to face up the results of our deeds and misdeeds. Today, we can see only one aspect of our

actions – that of immediate pleasure or gain – but the Day of Resurrection will place us in a position to see much more. Just as a person standing on top of a wall can look down on both sides, so shall we be able to see both aspects of the truth. Not only shall we watch our entire history unroll before us like a film, but we shall witness the consequences of our own worldly actions. ‘Then,’ as the Quran says, ‘shall each soul know what it has sent forward (to the Hereafter) and what it has kept back (in the world behind)’ (82:5). Whatever was done for worldly reasons will be left behind, unconsidered. Only those actions which were carried out with the Hereafter in mind will benefit us in the life to come.

Two men once brought a case before the Prophet for judgement. One had misappropriated the other’s land, but because of certain legal quirks, it was difficult to pass a verdict against him. After due consideration, the Prophet warned him: If the court gives a verdict in your favour, think of it as being fire and brimstone which you have been awarded’. The piece of land might, in terms of this world, have been a prized possession, but in the perspective of the Hereafter it would assume the terrible properties of fire and brimstone. The Prophet said – with justice – ‘Summer heat is a small part of the heat of Hell!’

These two sides of human deeds have been beautifully described through allegories and symbols in the *Hadith of the Miraj* (The Prophet’s journey to the Heavens) when the Prophet reached Sidrah al Muntaha (the lote tree at the end of the Seventh Heaven), he saw four rivers : two flowing inward and two flowing outward. It was explained to him by the Angel Gabriel that the two inward-flowing were rivers of Paradise and the outward-flowing were the Nile and the Euphrates.

By analogy, the present world and the Hereafter are two sides of the same event. The worldly side is trivial and temporary, while the Hereafter side is substantive and permanent. It is to the latter side that we must face up after death. Here one has complete freedom to live out one’s worldly existence as one wills; in the life-to-come, one will have no choice about the future course of one’s life. One will either be raised to eternal glory, or cast down into the pit of everlasting Hell.

Islamic Caliphate

There are certain of the basic principles of Islam which can be classed as objectives. While others clearly fall into the category of duties. For instance, no matter what the circumstances, gratefulness to God is placed before man as a definite aim. It is, indeed, man's purpose in life to be thankful to God. It is a requirement inherent in the Islamic life, a goal to which one must constantly direct one's steps. Charity, however, is an entirely different matter. It is a duty to be discharged only when one has the wherewithal. Man is obliged to abide by the divine law in regard to money only when he is already in possession of a sufficient quantity. An indigent member of the community is not, therefore, expected to make money at all costs simply in order to be able to obey divine commandments.

On the question of thankfulness, the Quran is explicit: "Serve God and render thanks to Him" (39:66). It is nowhere stated, however, that one must make money in order to discharge one's obligations with regard to alms-giving. On the contrary, it is laid down that when God gives money to the believer, the latter must spend it as enjoined. It follows then that on all occasions and in all circumstances, we must be thankful to God, but that the commandment regarding money will be applicable to us only when God has already granted it.

Political power and government can, on a parallel, be categorised as matters of duty rather than as objectives to be aimed at. That is to say that if we find ourselves, by the grace of God, in positions of power, it is our duty to exercise that power to the best of our ability, always bearing in mind what God desires. But power should never be regarded as a specific target. It should rather be looked upon as a gift from God, bestowed by Him at His own discretion, when and where He wills. Once invested with power, it should be incumbent upon individuals and nations alike to apply to themselves all of God's commandments on the question of *how* to rule. It is significant that the verbal forms used in the Quran on the wielding of power are conditional in aspect, whereas those of a purposive nature are unconditional. For instance, worship is enjoined as a categorical imperative: "Worship God till your death." Nowhere does the Quran proffer conditions such as "If we give them a mosque, then they will worship." Matters of politics and government, on the other hand, are presented as being contingent upon sets of prevailing circumstances: "Those who, once made masters in the lands, will attend to their prayers and pay the alms-tax, enjoin justice and forbid evil" (22:41).

The mention of power here is in the conditional tense, while worship is clearly referred to as being absolute and unconditional.

Concentration

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) one of the most famous thinkers of modern times, (although the writer does not agree with his views) played a major part in the intellectual formation of modern man.

Darwin achieved this position of eminence in the modern world by dint of exceptionally hard work. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1984) says of him:

"All his mental energy was focussed on his subject and that was why poetry, pictures and music ceased in his mature life to afford him the pleasure that they had given him in his earlier days." (5/495).

Such intellectual concentration is vital to peak achievement in any field, be it right or wrong. Man has to be so engrossed in his work that everything else pales into insignificance beside it. Unless everything else loses its interest for him, he cannot climb to any great heights of success. If we examine the lives of the truly great, we find that they all worked in the same dedicated way.

In any task of greater or lesser complexity, there are always aspects of it which present problems which appear at first sight to be insoluble. Sometimes innumerable facts have to be marshalled which can be interpreted only with the keenest of insight. Often a mysterious, elusive factor emerges just at a point when one thinks that all questions have been answered. Such difficulties can be overcome, and such secrets unveiled only when one's total intellectual capacity is directed towards the unravelling of the mystery. Without the utmost devotion and one hundred per cent concentration, success will remain forever beyond one's grasp.

The Message of the Quran

"Each one has a goal towards which he turns. So wherever you be, emulate one another in good works. God will bring you all before Him. He has power over all things. From wheresoever you depart, face towards the Sacred Mosque. This is surely the truth from your Lord. God is never heedless of what you do; whichever way you depart, face toward the Holy Mosque and wherever you are, face towards it, so that men will have no plea against you, except the evil-doers among them. Have no fear of them; fear Me, so that I may complete My favour to you and that you may be rightly guided. Indeed We have sent forth to you an apostle of your own people who will recite to you Our revelations and purify you of sin, who will instruct you in the Book and in wisdom and teach you that of which you had no knowledge. Remember Me, then, and I will remember you. Give thanks to Me and never deny Me" (2:148-152).

When the House of God in Mecca was appointed as the *qiblah*, the People of the Book started discussing whether the east was God's direction or the west. They saw the matter as one of direction alone, but there was more to it than that. The selection of the House of God as the *qiblah* was not merely the specification of a certain direction for prayer; it was a sign that the time had come for God to reveal His greatest favour to man. It had been decided a long time before, that, in answer to the prayer of Abraham and Ishmael (see 2:129), God would send a final Prophet to the world. The path to life everlasting was now being thrown open to all: God was consummating His favour to mankind. The bringing of religion to its final stage of perfection in Islam does not mean that previous religions were incomplete. They too were complete in themselves, but none of them was preserved in its original and authentic form. God had revealed true religion time and time again, but every time mankind rebelled against it and either distorted it or allowed it to fall into oblivion. Now it was revealed in its ultimate and indelible form. Divine religion had been allowed to deteriorate into a set of mythological tales; now it was incorporated into history in the form of solid facts. Up till then, no pattern of true religion had been preserved for posterity; now, in a permanent, dynamic and practicable form, it was placed before mankind. The change to Mecca was more than a change from one direction of worship to another; it was a clear indication that God's design for the guidance of mankind had been perfected.

It was at the time of the construction of the House of God that Abraham and Ishmael prayed for a prophet to come among the people of Mecca. The prayer was answered, and the coming of the final prophet, whose focus would be Mecca, was decreed. God's messengers who came to the world used to prophesy his coming.

Now that he had come the House of God in Mecca was made the *qibla* for all nations. This was God's sign, indicating that the prophet whose coming had been anticipated had finally arrived. As for the sincere – they needed no further proof, but even the conclusiveness of this sign was not enough to

silence those who gave no thought to God. It is those who fear God who are guided on the path to Him. God remembers those who remember Him. Only those who are full of fear of Him are free of fear of all else besides Him.

“Believers, seek help in patience and prayer. God is with the patient. Do not say that those who are slain in the cause of God are dead; they are alive, although you are not aware of them. We shall test you with some fear and hunger, with loss of life and property and crops. Give good news to the patient, who in adversity say: ‘We belong to God, and to Him we shall return.’ God’s blessing and mercy will be upon them; they are rightly guided” (2:153-157).

One who has adopted religion in the real sense of the word has truly discovered God. He lives in a permanent state of thanksgiving and remembrance of his Lord. Happiness and bliss come with such a life, though they are only to materialize in full and real form in the next eternal world. This world has not been created for reward: it has been created for the trial of man. Here obstacles have been placed in the path of those who seek to serve their Lord, so that the earnest can be distinguished from those who are lacking in zeal. These obstacles present themselves in the normal situations of life – human impulses, family requirements, worldly interests, temptation, social pressure – these are the things that provide the real test of life. First one has to realize in what manner one is being tested; then one has to avoid the pitfalls by remembering God and thanking Him for the blessings of life.

There is only one way to succeed in the trials of life, and that is through patience and prayer. This entails attaching oneself to God and conscientiously adhering to the path of truth, enduring all setbacks that afflict one on the way. Those who do not waver from the path because of the difficulties that lie on it – who stay with God despite the fact that no worldly benefit seems to accrue from their stance – these are the ones who will finally emerge successful from the trials of life. God has reserved the eternal blessings of the next life for those who show themselves willing to sacrifice this life for the next.

A major cause of suffering and affliction in this world is a believer’s attempt to preach the word of God. This is a task that involves criticism and admonition, and people have always loathed being criticised and admonished. The most sensitive in this regard are those who have used the name of religion to provide themselves with a worldly income. The preacher of God’s word, along with the message that he teaches, present a direct threat to the status of such people. Now everybody has to be weighed up against his teachings. Becoming a preacher of God’s word, then, is tantamount to putting one’s hand into a fire. One who takes this task upon himself is exposing himself to prejudice, economic ruin and even expulsion from his own land. He is placing both his life and property in the utmost peril. It is inevitable that one who follows God’s path will be persecuted in this world. But it is those who lose all for God’s sake who are the true finders; it is those who give their lives for Him who inherit life everlasting. For those who do not seek to make their paradise in this ephemeral world, God has prepared an eternal paradise in the next.

12 July 1987

No Superiority on the basis of birth

Two women once came to Ali to ask him to give them something. One was Arab by birth, and the other was a freed slave of hers. Ali ordered that each of them be given a young camel for food and forty dirhams apiece. The freed slave took what she was given and departed. The Arab woman said: "Commander of the Faithful, how is it that you are giving me the same amount as you have given to this woman, considering that I am an Arab and she a freed slave?" Ali's rejoinder was that he had found no mention in the Book of God of the progeny of Ishmael being superior to the progeny of Ishaq.

Human Nature

Mount Everest, at 29,028 feet above sea level, is the highest peak in the world. Over a period of 30 years about 10 expeditions had set out to scale it but had failed. Finally, on May 29, 1953, two men succeeded in reaching the summit – Sir Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay.

Tenzing Norgay started out in life as a mountain coolie from Nepal. After this event, he shot to extraordinary fame, and began to receive invitations from all over the world. He also had the opportunity to meet the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other world personalities, and was later appointed Director of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. His biography, published under the title of *Man of Everest*, was written in English – although Tenzing knew little English – by a western writer, James Ramsey Ullman. (*Indian Express*, New Delhi, 10 May, 1986).

Tenzing died on May 9, 1986, and Sir Edmund Hilary, who had, incidentally, become the High Commissioner for New Zealand in India, issued an obituary which paid fitting tribute to him. It said, in this obituary, that when Tenzing succeeded in reaching the top of Everest, “at the high point of his life, he knelt in the snow, made a little hole and put sweets into it – his gesture to the gods”.

Every man has a strong natural urge to attribute his successes to some superior being, but when he has been left in a state of unawareness that there is only one true God, he makes his obeisance to gods of his own invention.

13 July 1987

Do as you would be done by

Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as saying: "When your Muslim brother comes to you to excuse himself, accept his excuse, for otherwise you will not receive from me the water that I shall hand out at the Pond of Plenitude."

13 July 1987

Speaking little, and not holding grudges against anyone

A companion of the Prophet lay dying. People saw that his face was shining, and asked why. "I had two habits which stood me in good stead." the man

Right Man – Right Results

The late Sir C.V. Raman (1888-1970), who received the Nobel prize for physics in 1928, achieved international repute and is still the most famous name in the field of Indian science. His discovery, known as the Raman effect, is one of the established pieces of scientific information which is useful in the study of molecular energy levels.

Born in an ordinary family, (his father was a school teacher drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 10), Raman had to work hard in difficult circumstances to make his way to the top. This is how he described his journey to success – “A long history of frustration, disappointment, struggle and every kind of tribulation.”

All great men have their detractors, and one of them, wishing to underrate his academic success, commented that his famous discovery had been a mere accident, as in the case of many other scientists who had discovered important things just by chance. On hearing this, Raman displayed no annoyance but replied quite seriously that “the idea that a scientific discovery can be made by accident, is ruled out by the fact that the ‘accident’ if it is one, never occurs except to the right man.”

Dr. Raman summed up the process of discovery in these words: “The right man, right thinking, right instruments and right results.”

(The Hindustan Times, January 17, 1987)

Forget other's faults, but not one's own

Salmah told his son Ayas how, once, when Umar ibn al-Khattab was passing by, he struck him on the edge of his garment with a whip he happened to be carrying, telling him to get out of the way. In the course of the following year, Umar met Salmah and asked him if he wanted to go on Hajj, when Salmah replied in the affirmative, Umar took him by the hand and led him to his house where he handed over six hundred dirhams, saying: "Use this towards the expense of your Hajj. I'd like you to know that it is for the blow I gave you." "I do not remember it," said Salmah. "But I have not forgotten it." said Umar.

(Hayat as-Sahabah, Vol. II, p. 95)

Across Three Continents (*continued*)

The Conference

The Bamako Islamic conference was inaugurated on the evening of December 6th, 1985. The Malian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Education were present at the opening ceremony along with other dignitaries. The three working languages were Arabic, English and French. The conference was attended by delegates from various parts of the world. As was pointed out by the Kuwaiti delegate: "We have come from the western portions of the earth and from its eastern portions."

Muslim intellectuals from the following countries took part; Canada, Mali, Cyprus, Greece, Saudi Arabia, The Maldives, Switzerland, Madagascar, England, North America, South America, Brazil, Sudan, Kenya, India, Turkey, Kuwait, Pakistan, Guyana, Syria, The Philippines, Ghana, Gambia, Holland, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Korea, Tunisia, Nigeria, the Yemen and Japan.

The majority of the speeches and discussions centred on two main topics: Islamic *Dawah* and the attacks on Islam or on Muslims, by other nations. The latter topic was actually given the greater prominence. The various delegates explained the difficulties they were facing in their respective countries, especially at the hands of Zionism, Communism and modern Imperialism.

Even the discussion of *Dawah* had a defensive ring to it. It was pointed out that in the last few years, the Christian church had set its mind on converting large numbers of Muslims to Christianity, or at least changing their outlook so radically that their intellectual roots were no longer in religion, making them neither Muslim nor Christian. To this end, Christian missionaries were working among Muslims with considerable zeal. From the lengthy discussions on this subject, the most important question which emerged was on ways of stemming such endeavour.

One of the African delegates made the point that the real reason for the Christian missionaries' success among the Muslims was the latter's poverty and the excessive difficulty of life in large tracts of the African continent. In fact, the basic issues nowadays were, more often than not, survival versus extinction. People who did not even have such basic necessities as clothing and housing often converted to Christianity simply to obtain these things. "When we have lost everything," they say, "how does it matter if we lose our faith as well?"

It was explained that this was why all cases of conversion had occurred in villages, where poverty is more acute. In the cities, no Muslim changes his religion, for the simple reason that it is quite possible to make a living there without renouncing one's faith. Another proof that turning Christian is motivated by materialistic consideration is the fact that many people who convert to Christianity later revert to Islam.

Another participant said that the real reason for conversion is not material bankruptcy but intellectual bankruptcy. "This is all the outcome of a lack of Islamic consciousness," he said. It was his belief that we should place special emphasis on the education of African Muslims, particularly those living in rural areas. If people were to become educated, they would automatically be safeguarded from dangers of this nature. The present unsatisfactory state of the Muslim world was also ascribed to the fact that control of Islamic affairs lay in the hands of ignorant rather than of learned men. This statement, made by one of the Arab scholars, is undeniable. It is, indeed, a fact that people of true learning are few and far between and that the responsibility for Muslim affairs has passed into the hands of those who have nothing to offer save ignorance. But we must ask ourselves why this has happened. The real reason for this would appear to be a regrettable neglect of the Book and the *Sunnah*, and a failure to come to grips with the exigencies of modern living.

An Arab scholar told of a European who, having made a study of Islam, later remarked on the pitiable state of the Muslims: "They have a faith but lack men of faith 1" It is quite true that today, Islam is the one true faith in the whole world, but its Muslim standard-bearers have become so devoid of spirit that they can no longer be expected to behave constructively. They are like wood which, having rotted away, cannot be put to any good use.

An Egyptian scholar also lamenting the state of present day Muslims, said that they had acquired the habit of sowing a seed one day and expecting by the next day that it should have borne fruit. Still, he remarked, we should not lose heart, nor should we give up all hope.

The delegate from Afghanistan speaking within the narrower purview of national affairs said that although his nation was small, the Afghans were possessed of an indomitable spirit. "Our *jihad*," he said, "will not end with the liberation of Afghanistan. After freeing Afghanistan we will go on to liberate the Muslims across the border who are the slaves of the Soviet Union."

This statement, unfortunately, did not impress me. Emotional utterances of this nature, far from solving problems, only serve to aggravate them.

Learning how to listen.

I am more in the habit of listening than of speaking, and, during the conference, I kept up this habit. When one of the participants commented on my not speaking as much as the others, I told him that I was trying to be a good listener. Most of our groups seem to think that they should talk continuously, even when etiquette requires them to remain silent. Amongst present-day Muslim groups, it is only the *Tablighis* (followers of the Tabligh Movement) who show any recognition of the value of keeping quiet and listening to what others say.

Refugees

One delegate pointed out in his speech that in the world of today there are no less than 10 million refugees – that is to say, people who have had to leave their country in the face of oppression and persecution. (The speaker was himself a refugee, and now lives in Europe.) Out of this number, approximately 7 million are Muslims, half a million of them being in Sudan alone. Commenting on this state of affairs, another delegate made the emotional charge that; if they were refugees, it was because they were fighting for Islam. Thinking in this way is the result of a gross misapprehension, and present-day Muslims all over the world fall into the same error. What they are actually fighting for is not Islam, but, their own nationalistic ends, and without having it clear in their minds what they are aiming at, have taken it upon themselves to call this kind of War *jihad*. These wars, moreover, are futile because they are being fought without any real preparation. In my opinion, baseless wars of this nature are not worthy of the name of Islamic *jihad*. To give them this illustrious and time-honoured appellation only serves to degrade the word *jihad*.

When Islam ceases to exist in its true form

An official of a certain institute recounted the story of an elderly lady who had come to him, saying that she wanted to perform Hajj, but did not have the means to undertake the journey. She asked if the institute could make arrangements for her travelling expenses so that she could do so. She was told that since she lacked the means, – from the point of view of the Shariah – it was not incumbent upon her to go on the pilgrimage. She answered: “I have been going on Hajj every year for the last seventeen years, why should I be deprived of it this year?” This is the kind of misconception which occurs when Islam ceases to exist in its true form.

Dawah Power.

One of the speaker gave an account of the situation in Holland, part of which concerned a gathering in the Dutch town of Utrecht which had been attended by many Muslims from Europe and America, with participation even by members of the Christian church. In the course of a dialogue on Muslim-Christian relations, an Engineer from Belgium declared his acceptance of Islam, and, at the close of the session, a number of people from one of Holland’s villages also entered the fold.

Clearly, Islam’s greatest strength is its message, but if it is ever to make a true impact, that message must be communicated as was done in Holland. Unfortunately, the present-day standard bearers of Islam in other parts of the world are making fewer and fewer attempts to do so, thus depriving themselves and the world of this great source of strength.

In spite of this neglect of the duty of *dawah*, Islam still manages, by virtue of its inherent strength, to find” a place in the hearts of people all over the world. An African delegate told of the conversion to

Islam of a Christian from Mombassa, who subsequently wrote a book on Islam, in Swahili, entitled, *Why I Forsook Christianity*. His main contention was that according to the New Testament, the Messiah stated that he had come to the Children of Israel, whereas Mohammad had been sent for the benefit of the whole world.

How much there is in Islam which gives it a universal appeal. But Muslims, caught up in petty, nationalistic issues, lose sight to their principle duty, which is to propagate Islamic ideals on a universal scale.

Contradiction between practice and principle

On the way back from Bamako, I met a French Engineer at the airport by the name of Barnar. After conversing together for about half an hour, he told me, in response to one of my questions, that he read the Bible, and believed in it, but did not attend church. When I asked him why, he said that there was a contradiction between the Bible and the Church, in that the Bible forbade the worship of idols, while the churches were full of them. As for the divinity of Jesus, he said that Jesus was not the son of God in any biological sense, and that he felt the word 'son' should be taken in a metaphorical rather than a literal sense.

Famine in Africa: Motivating Factors in Giving Aid

Speaking of the famine which afflicted Ethiopia in 1984-85 a participant from America said that initially, the US government had shown no interest in the matter. Later, however, after the crisis had received wide coverage in the media and various governments had made substantial contributions to the famine relief fund, the whole issue became a matter of international prestige for America, laying claim as it did to world leadership. If they failed to play their part in a humanitarian issue of such vast proportions, they would likewise fail to bolster their position as world leaders in the eyes of the international fraternity.

The American Vice President, George Bush, then called together officials of famine – and agencies working in Ethiopia, some of whom were Muslims, and wrote out a cheque for one billion dollars, so that this generosity on the part of America should be front page news allover the world the next morning, the cheque signing was done at a televised ceremony attended by 72 correspondents.

All too often, actions which appear generous and conciliatory are carried out merely to consolidate a certain position. Their motivation is all a matter of power politics and has little to do with altruism.

Building from the top.

An Arab scholar made certain painful observations on the state of present-day Muslims. "I am sorry to say that Muslims, commence their works from the top and that is why they achieve nothing. Their works never reach completion, because in order to complete anything, one has to start at the foundations." It is indeed lamentable that this weakness is found in Muslims the world over.

The real task ahead

When the conference was over, I returned via Paris and London on December 10. At Paris I found that my onward journey had not been confirmed, so that the lady at the desk had to do a good half hour's work on the telephone, computer and telex to sort matters out. Even then, no direct flight from Paris to Delhi being available, the route had to be changed, entailing repeated re-calculations of flight schedules. In spite of all this extra work, she became neither exasperated nor annoyed. Finally she managed to book me on a British Airways Flight from London to Delhi. All this had taken quite a long time and I had to rush to catch the B A Flight. It was not until I had reached the aircraft that I discovered that I had left my collection of books at the airport desk. When I informed the air-stewards of this, they requested me to remain seated, assuring me that they would fetch my books. They then telephoned from the aircraft itself to the lady at the desk, who sent my package immediately. Just as the plane was about to take off, it was handed over to me.

I was quite bowled over by this whole episode and now cannot find words of praise good enough for the speed, precision and efficiency with which everything was carried out. All the airport systems had to be in working order to produce such excellent results. The fact is, the world of today is not in need of any "better order", which is that our politically-minded Islamists would like to bestow to the world. But to my way of thinking the world has got all the order that it needs. Rather, it is food for the soul which mankind stands in need. The real work to which those who seek to propagate Islam should address themselves is that of presenting Islam in the form of spiritual nourishment.

Promotion of one's own interests

On the BA flight, the announcements were made first of all in Arabic. Various notices on the aircraft were written in Arabic on top and in English below. We were also told over the loudspeaker that among the stewards on board, there were people who knew English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Urdu and Punjabi, and that we could ask for whatever we needed in our own language. Hearing this, I realized that having people on the cabin crew who know the main world languages was not just a way of being more helpful and obliging to passengers, but a way of plying their international trade more profitably. If any venture is to be successful, the requirements of the clientele have to be properly catered for. But when it comes to spreading the word of God, the urge to be so accommodating has not proved so strong, for nowhere is there an Islamic Institute which has made arrangements to have a multi-lingual staff, so that people speaking different languages may have the benefit of Islamic teachings. It seems that for man worldly motivation is more potent than that of the next world.

Were it ever to be asserted that Islam had come to the world for the benefit of one nation alone, all Muslims would dispute this. But, in practice, the behaviour of Muslims would suggest that Islam is the exclusive prerogative of one single nation. In this, they are out of step with the rest of the world, and what is necessary is a major readjustment of their ideas. They are like the passenger who went from

Delhi to Bamako and, not realizing that there is a difference of six and a half hours between Delhi time and Bamako time, felt bewildered when he could not relate to what was happening all around him. All that it took was a readjustment of his watch to local time, and then everything fell neatly into place. Similarly, in Islamic affairs, an adjustment in our time-scale must be made. We must realize that we are now living in the twentieth century and that if the Islamic message is to have its full impact, the ways and means of propagating it must be adopted to present-day conditions in different parts of the world. The most important aspect of this readjustment will be the development of a multilingual approach (111: 24-43).

To Make up for Helplessness

God's power is absolute; man's power before His is as nothing. It is not true to say that the difference between God and man is one of having more power or less power; rather the difference is one of power and powerlessness. God is omnipotent, while man has not one iota of power.

What if one questions the very propriety of God having created man as a powerless creature? What if one claims that it was not fair of God to have put man in a world in which he has no power over himself, or over the world around him? This question can only be answered if a way is found in which man can completely make up for his helplessness. Nothing less than complete compensation will provide a satisfactory answer. Added to this, the compensation for man's helplessness must come from his helplessness itself. It must be the very fact that man has no power that makes up for his powerlessness, for otherwise the answer will not fit the question.

The answer to this question is given clearly in the teachings of the Quran and Prophet of Islam. God has shown us special mercy: He has made asking sufficient to ensure that we receive. If a person makes a real, earnest supplication to God, then he will find what he seeks. Since man has no power of his own, he has to be given something in order to possess it. God has promised that one who prays for something will receive it. One who presents his helplessness before God in the form of humble supplication will receive compensation for his helplessness. In this way God gives unto man from his own presence.

The Prophet of Islam put it this way: "No prayer is ever rejected." These words of the Prophet Jesus express the same truth:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;

knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;

And to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread,
will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven given good things to them that ask him.

(St. Mathew 7:7-11)

Participating in Spirit

In the year 9AH, the Prophet led an expedition to Tabuk. Some Muslims had valid excuses precluding their participation in this expedition. With regard to them, this verse of the Quran was revealed:

It shall be no offence for the disabled, the sick, and those lacking the means to spend, to stay behind, if they are true to Allah and His Apostle. The righteous shall not be blamed: Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Nor shall those be blamed who, when they came to you demanding conveyances to the battle-front and you said: 'I can find none to carry you,' went away in tears grieving that they could not find the means to spend (9:91-92).

According to the Prophet's seventh century biographer, Ibn Ishaq, these were seven individuals belonging to the Ansar. After the Prophet had set out on the expedition, the Prophet referred to them in the presence of his companions. "Do you know," he said to them, "you have left some people behind in Medina who will share with you the reward of everything you have spent, every valley you have crossed and every victory you have gained over the enemy." "Even though they remain in Medina?" asked the companions. "Yes," replied the Prophet. "They had valid excuses for staying behind."

This goes to show that a person, without doing anything, can gain a share in the reward of those who have. While appearing to have achieved nothing, he can join the ranks of those who have achieved much. How can this be? The way to accomplish this is for us to participate in spirit in those actions in which we are unable to take an active, physical part. For example, if we behold another person greater than ourselves, rather than being jealous of him, we should acknowledge his superiority; that way we shall have a share in the reward for anything that he does, which it is beyond us to accomplish. If someone is wealthier than ourselves it should be our heart's wish that God grant him the grace to be truly thankful for his wealth, and spend it rightly; then, when he does so, we shall have a share in his reward. And if we see someone in an influential position, while we remain among the anonymous masses, we can pray for him: "Lord, may he use his influence in service of truth, not in service of falsehood"; thus we may gain a share of his reward.

All for the Sake of 31 Days

The January 1983 elections in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh brought the Telugu Desam party, under leadership of N.T. Rama Rao, into power. On August 16, 1984, however, N.T. Rama Rao's government was dismissed by the then governor, Mr. Ram Lal, and a Telugu Desam dissident, N.T. Bhaskara Rao, invited to form a government in alliance with the Congress party. Mr. Bhaskara Rao was given 30 days to prove his majority in the 293 member state assembly.

Mr. Bhaskara Rao's group then made a concerted effort to win over MLA's. According to the *Hindustan Times* (September 13, 1984), a price of 2 million rupees was placed on the head of each MLA. What N.T. Rama Rao did to foil him was to confine members loyal to him in his own Ramakrishna Studios. When Mr. Bhaskara Rao proved unable to prove his majority on the floor of the house within 30 days, his government became unconstitutional and was dismissed by the new stage governor Mr. S.D. Sharma. On September 16, 1984, Mr. Sharma invited N.T. Rama Rao to form a government once again.

On September 19, 1984, The Times of India published a special report on events in Andhra Pradesh, highlighting the misdemeanours of N.T. Bhaskara Rao during his short term of office. The month-long chief minister had released a state government fund of 100 crore (1000 million) rupees, and had started openly inviting members of the state assembly to "defect and be a minister." The writer continues:

During his 31-day, uncertain career as chief minister, Mr. Bhaskara Rao behaved and acted as if he had come to stay for a hundred years.

This is an apt description of the way everyone acts in this world. One is only in the world for a short period; it might only be for a 31 day spell. Yet people act as if they have come to the world to stay. How extraordinary it is that man should come into the world and live here as if he were never going to leave; yet departure from this world is inevitable, and comes sooner than he plans.